INTEROPERABILITY

New Group Will Have Great Influence Over Internet

Kobe, Japan—Networking luminaries from 70 countries gathered here recently for INET 92, the international networking conference where the Internet Society was officially launched.

More than 1,000 people have become charter members of the Internet Society, and with the INET conference, a new professional association was born.

The purpose of the Internet Society is to move this worldwide network from its current U.S.-centric focus into a truly international body. The society, in addition to the annual conference (to be held next year in San Francisco), has an extensive publications program, and has incorporated the Internet Architecture Board and the Internet Engineering Task Force.

INET 92 was the launch of a member-run organization that will have a tremendous influence over the emerging global Internet. Internationalization of the network, and of the Internet's governing bodies, is crucial.

According to Larry Landweber of the University of Wisconsin, the Internet now reaches 107 countries. The Internet proper—the TCP/IP-connected core—now includes more than 900,000 hosts.

Most impressive is the spread of networking into new regions of the world. TCP/IP and BITnet are reaching into Northern Africa, Fidonet nodes are spreading into the south of the continent, and Latin and South America are rapidly joining the Internet Protocol world through numerous projects. Eastern Europe has a national network activity in almost every country.

The key to the success of the Internet Society depends upon how well it can determine its internal structure and procedures. If the society truly wants to be *the* representative body for the members of the Internet, it must be a member-run body.

The Internet traditionally has been run by an elite group, a benevolent technocracy that has done a great job moving from the original Arpanet toward today's network. Now, however, the network is becoming a truly global infrastructure. The Internet Society can be a key catalyst in that move.

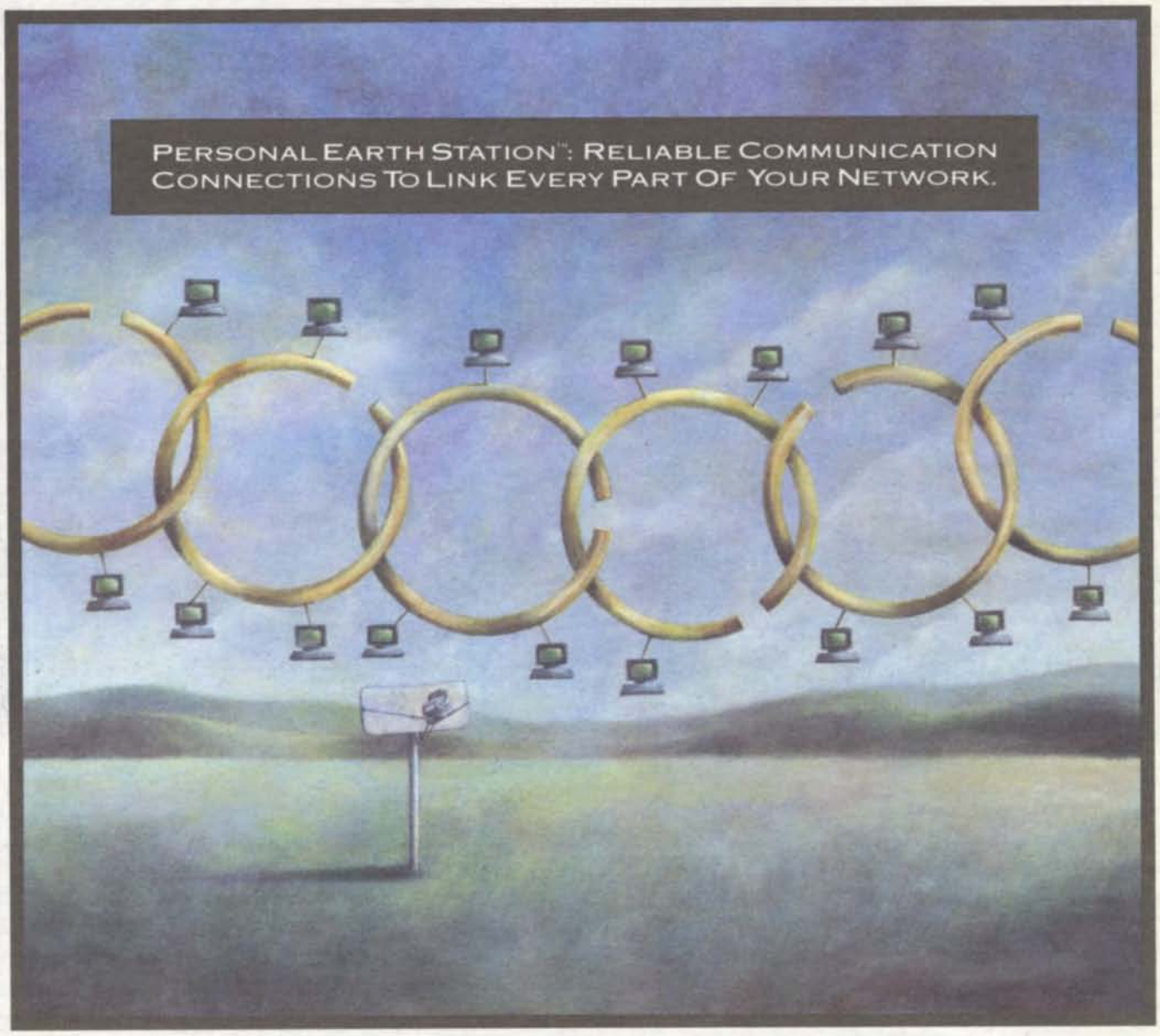
One of the great opportunities for the society is to take an active role in international politics, helping to nudge organizations like the International Telecommunication Union and the International Organization for Standardization into a more positive direction.

The ITU and ISO have become elite enclaves for professional standards-makers, unresponsive to the millions of users in real networks. The Internet Society can help change that, advocating a more realistic set of policies by international organizations.

The Internet Society took an important first step, filing for International Organization status with the ITU, a status that will let it submit resolutions to upcoming plenipotentiary conferences. Instead of just dismissing the ITU and its international brethren, we can change the way they work.

To join the Internet Society, send electronic mail to isoc@nri.reston.va.us. ■

CARL MALAMUD is writing Exploring the Internet: A Technical Travelogue, *a book that will be featured as The Interop Book at Interop Fall. The opinions expressed are his own.*



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